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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003073

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SUBJECT: THE AWA ARE PLEASED WITH RESPONSE TO MASSACRE, WELCOME USG
HELP

REF: BOGOTA 2839

CLASSIFIED BY: Brian A. Nichols, DCM; REASON: 1.4B, D

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On September 15 the DCM and several USG officials met with the president of the Awa Indigenous People's Unity Association (UNIPA), Gabriel Bisbicus, and several representatives of the Awa community. Bisbicus said the Prosecutor General's investigation into the killing of 12 Awa by unknown assailants on August 26 is proceeding well. The assailants likely included local Awa involved in criminal activities, according to Bisbicus. He did not rule out involvement of some military with links to illegal armed groups. President Uribe offered to provide additional security to the Awa, but they declined citing the associated risks of the military presence. The UNIPA representatives lamented the deteriorating social conditions and territorial encroachment resulting from illegal armed groups' increased violence and narco-trafficking activities in the region. Awa communities also perceive aerial eradication efforts as having a negative effect on their crops. Bisbicus responded positively to our offers of assistance and the Embassy will follow-up to arrange consultative meetings to explore opportunities. End Summary.

MURDER INVESTIGATION PROCEEDING WELL

¶2. (C) Awa Indigenous People's Unity Association (UNIPA) president Gabriel Bisbicus told the DCM -- accompanied by INL/LP Director Francisco Palmieri, Embassy Regional Refugee Coordinator and USAID staff -- that he believes the Colombian National Police (CNP) would soon make arrests in the August 26 murders of 12 Awa indigenous in Tumaco, Narino (reftel). Bisbicus said that CNP and Prosecutor General investigators (CTI) have made substantial progress, and want to build a complete case before arresting the suspects all at once.

13. (C) In a somewhat elliptical manner, Bisbicus said that the assailants likely included local Awa involved with criminal activities. He added that those responsible should receive the most severe punishment, whether Awa or not. Bisbicus would not rule out that some soldiers with links to criminal groups and acting on their own, and not as part of the military institution, may have been involved as well. Bisbicus noted that two of the victims had been pregnant at the time of their murders, increasing the number of victims. Six eye-witnesses survived the attack rather than three as has been reported in the press. The witnesses were able to provide the CNP and CTI with solid leads. Bisbicus appeared fully satisfied with the investigation.

14. (C) In a separate conversation in Tumaco that same day, CNP Lt. Col. Ordonez confirmed to NAS officers that the CNP has made substantial progress in the investigation and expects to make arrests within a month. Ordonez said he is sure that it was a local criminal killing, possibly motivated by revenge. He also repeated that there may be a link to the murder of two Ecuadorian traders in this community two months ago. (A family member of one of the victims of this massacre reportedly witnessed the earlier killings.) Ordonez noted that there is a lot of extortion and illegal economic activity in the community where the massacre took place.

AWA REJECT URIBE'S OFFER OF MILITARY SECURITY

15. (C) Referring to his meeting with President Uribe soon after the massacre, Bisbicus said that he rejected Uribe's offer to station troops in and around the Awa reservation. Bisbicus suggested that soldiers would cause more problems than they would solve, as they would attract reprisals from illegal armed groups, need to be fed, romantically pursue the Awa's "daughters," and could not guarantee security due to the wide geographic dispersal of Awa homes. Bisbicus added that Uribe had declined to build more roads in the area, as it would facilitate the movement of illegal groups.

16. (C) The Awa have suffered five massacres, many killings and frequent displacements due to violence in the last three years. Bisbicus said his tribe did not trust outsiders to keep them safe. The Awa prefer to create an Awa security/ self-defense force. El Tiempo, a leading daily newspaper in Bogota, reported on September 19 that three more Awa had been between killed in Narino between September 13 and 17.

BAD INFLUENCES RUN AMOK

17. (C) The UNIPA representatives laid out in some detail the various threats their community faces: paramilitaries (Bisbicus believes that these groups are direct descendants of the former United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and rejects the government's term "new emerging criminal bands"); the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); the National Liberation Army (ELN); and common criminals. These groups compete for land and resources to support their illicit activities, and increasingly use threats and violence to intimidate and manipulate civilian populations -- especially the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Confinement of entire villages and the widespread use of landmines and improvised explosive devices restrict the Awa's ability to provide food and security.

¶18. (SBU) Bisbicus also said that his community faces poverty and problems gaining access to education and health care. The Awa seek to maintain their own culture, language and traditions and do not want the presence of any armed group whether illegal or Colombian security forces. Bisbicus lamented that the Awa communities do not have basic infrastructure and this makes it difficult for them to travel and engage in legitimate commerce. For example, it requires hours to walk from some homes to the main road. The poor infrastructure makes it difficult for the Awa to establish and maintain links to other tribes, including Awa who have migrated to Ecuador.

COCA COMPLAINTS

¶19. (C) Bisbicus complained that aerial coca eradication had damaged Awa crops and the environment. The DCM explained the complaints process to him and said that an environmental officer would brief the Awa on how to document and file complaints for damage to legitimate crops. Bisbicus said that his community did not want coca (Awa leaders have issued a decree banning its cultivation on their territories) and would be willing to accept voluntary eradication help from the Embassy and GOC. While denying that his

community grew coca, Bisbicus said that the spray of legitimate sylvan and farmed crops had spurred resentment that prompted some in the community to grow coca as their only way to survive. Two other Awa present complained about the broader environmental impact of spray, and said that eradication was a futile exercise given U.S. demand drove the supply.

GRATEFUL FOR USG HELP

¶10. (SBU) Bisbicus thanked the DCM for U.S.-funded International Organization of Migration (IOM) projects to train 40 Awa in first aid and asked for additional USG assistance in building clinics, schools, and improving infrastructure such as roads. He also said the Awa community needs ambulances and income generation projects. The DCM said that the Embassy wants to support the Awa and that the U.S. Congress has made providing assistance to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities a priority. Bisbicus said that infrastructure projects that involve the U.S. military are not welcome. The DCM offered to provide some concrete suggestions for cooperation to Bisbicus in the near future with regard to education, health care and income generation.

¶11. (SBU) Bisbicus added that the Awa are pleased with the response of the government and international organizations to the mass displacement following the most recent massacre. Post's Refugee Coordinator offered to explore prepositioning emergency supplies for Awa and building a community center that could be used as a shelter during temporary displacements.

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